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MEG'S DIVERSION

A DRAMA IN TWO ACTS

BY

H. T. CRAVEN

NEW AMERICAN EDITION, CORRECTLY REPRINTED FROM THE ORIGINAL AUTHORIZED ACTING EDITION, WITH THE ORIGINAL CASTS OF THE CHARACTERS, ARGUMENT OF THE PLAY, TIME OF REPRESENTATION, DESCRIPTION OF THE COSTUMES, SCENE AND PROPERTY PLOTS, DIAGRAMS OF THE STAGE SETTINGS, SIDES OF ENTRANCE AND EXIT, RELATIVE POSITIONS OF THE PERFORMERS, EXPLANATION OF THE STAGE DIRECTIONS, ETC., AND ALL OF THE STAGE BUSINESS.

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MEG'S DIVERSION.

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

	New Royal Theatre, London, Oct. 17th, 1866.	*Wallack's Theatre, New York, Nov. 12th, 1867.*
JEREMY CROW, *a Devonshire farmer.*	Mr. Russell.	Mr. John Gilbert.
ASHLEY MERTON ESQ., *of the Hall.*	Mr. C. Wyndham.	Mr. B. T. Ringgold.
JASPER PIDGEON, *a village carpenter.*	Mr. H. T. Craven.	Mr. A. W. Young.
ROLAND PIDGEON, *his brother.*	Mr. F Dewar.	Mr. J. B. Polk.
EYTEM, *an Exeter lawyer.*	Mr. Kenward.	Mr. J. W. Leonard.
CORNELIA, MARGARET, *daughters of Crow.*	Miss Annie Bourke. Miss M. Oliver.	Mrs. W. Winter. Mrs. Clara Jennings,
MRS. NETWELL, *of the Grange —a widow.*	Mrs. Leigh Murray.	Miss Annie Ward.

VILLAGERS AND FARM LABORERS.

ACT I.—Parlor in CROW'S Farm-house.

ACT II.—Garden in CROW'S Farm. (In this act is realized Calderon's celebrated picture of "*Broken Vows.*")

Three months are supposed to elapse between Acts I and II.

Period,—The Present.

TIME OF PLAYING,—ONE HOUR AND THREE QUARTERS.

THE ARGUMENT.

JEREMY CROW, a farmer supposed to be rich in owning the largest farm in the county, which for many years, however, has been mortgaged to its full value, hopes and intends that his two daughters shall marry rich men who will supply the funds necessary to relieve him from embarrassment rather than see their father-in-law disgraced by financial ruin. These matrimonial plans are strengthened by his elder daughter's betrothal to ASHLEY MERTON, an aristocratic Squire who prides himself on being something of a philosopher and is directing CORNELIA'S education so as to fit her to become mistress of Merton Hall. This is a sore trial to MRS. NETWELL, whose residence adjoins that of the Squire, who is sacrificing his regard for his fair neighbor in order to be philosophical.

MEG, the farmer's younger daughter, is still fancy free but has an ardent admirer in JASPER PIDGEON, a young carpenter whose suit is discouraged by MEG'S relatives because of his plebeian origin. But JASPER has recently been the recipient of a large fortune; and for the sake of securing a loan with which to make a necessarily immediate payment, CROW induces MEG to let JASPER suppose himself an accepted suitor, which she consents to, accompanying the supposition with much ridicule and teasing.

JASPER'S brother, ROLAND PIDGEON, had been brought up by an uncle whose property he had expected to inherit; but for some slight misdemeanor on his part, the uncle's estate had, instead, been left to JASPER. The latter generously wishes to share his inheritance with ROLAND who, in turn, good-naturedly declines the generous offer, and, at the same time, resolves to avenge MEG'S ill-treatment of his brother. ROLAND'S education and experience, his appearance and manner being greatly superior to JASPER'S his retaliation becomes easy and has a favorable opening through his saving CROW'S life, which enables him to become a frequent visitor at the farm; and he readily wins MEG'S regard, which causes her much regret for JASPER whom she has learned to respect as a friend while the time approaches when she has promised him her definite answer. MRS. NETWELL'S tenderness for the Squire has caused her to refuse repeated offers of marriage from MR. EYTEM, her lawyer, who is connected also in a business way with farmer CROW and the PIDGEON brothers.

ASHLEY MERTON becoming gradually conscious of his cooling affection for CORNELIA, and desiring that her regard for him should be tested, induces ROLAND, ever ready for frolic, to profess love to the young lady who is away at school. Again, as in MEG'S case, ROLAND woos successfully, but this time loses his own heart; and shortly afterward he and CORNELIA return to the farm and make their intentions known, to the Squire's relief, and CROW'S resentment until he learns that ROLAND is his uncle's heir after all. At first this sudden turn of affairs causes MEG much grief and humiliation, but she acknowledges that the unsparing lesson was richly deserved. JASPER, however, angrily resents his brother's conduct, in spite of the latter's motive, and a furious quarrel is averted only by the interference of MEG who has found that she can and does love JASPER. The latter finally proves acceptable as a son-in-law to CROW, whose pecuniary hopes are now realized; EYTEM makes a virtue of necessity;

MRS. NETWELL and MERTON unite philosophy and matrimony; and general happiness results from MEG'S DIVERSION.

COSTUMES.

CROW.—The usual dress of a substantial farmer; cord breeches and top boots.

MERTON.—First Dress—Fashionable morning suit. Second Dress—Black ditto, white vest, and hat band.

JASPER.—First Dress—Cord trowsers, brown short-tailed coat, blue velvet waistcoat, scarlet neck-tie, and white hat. Second Dress—Blue frock coat, drab trowsers, and billycock hat.

ROLAND.—Fashionable morning suits.

EYTEM.—Black, with white neck-tie.

CORNELIA.—First Dress—Traveling dress. Second Dress—Light silk, with hat or bonnet.

MARGARET.—First Dress—Light print trimmed with blue, broad straw hat. Second Dress—Violet velvet jacket, black handkerchief on head.

MRS. NETWELL.—Handsome silk dresses, shawl and bonnet.

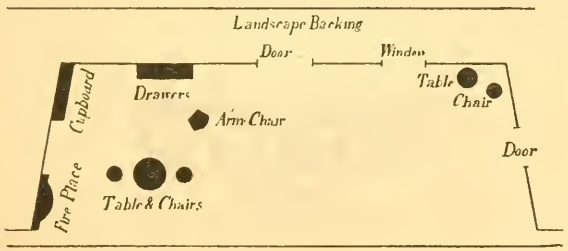
PROPERTIES.

ACT I.—Chest of drawers, with mirror hanging over it, R., against flat. Table, with writing-materials on it, and two chairs, down R. C. Arm chair up R. C. Small table L., against the flat. Chair up L. Basket of eggs, letter, and large placard bearing the word "ENGAGED," for MEG. Parcel and bank check for JASPER. Letter for EYTEM. Glass and bottle (filled) in cupboard. Bonnet-box.

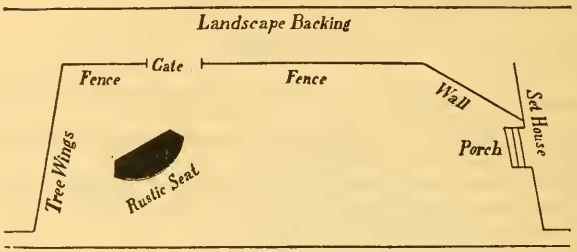
ACT II.—Rustic garden seat, R. C. Bundle of law papers and tape for EYTEM. Flower for ROLAND. Notes, in pocket-book, for JASPER.

STAGE SETTINGS.

ACT I.



ACT II.



SCENE PLOT.

ACT I.—Plain chamber set in 3 G. Landscape backing in 4 G. In flat, door C., and latticed window L. C. Door L. 2 E. Fire-place R. 1 E. Cupboard R. 3 E.

ACT II.—Garden in 3 G., backed with landscape backing in 4 G. Set house L., with entrance and porch at L. 2 E. Set wall, overgrown with ivy etc., running obliquely from house to fence which extends across stage in 3 G. A gate, R. C., in fence. Gravel paths and made-up flower-beds in the foreground.

STAGE DIRECTIONS.

In observing, the player is supposed to face the audience. R., means right; L., left; C., centre; R. C., right of centre; L. C., left of centre; D. F., door in the flat or back scene; R. F., right side of the flat; L. F., left side of the flat; R. D., right door; L. D., left door; C. D., centre door; 1 E., first entrance; 2 E., second entrance; U. E., upper entrance; 1, 2 or 3 G., first, second or third grooves; UP STAGE, toward the back; DOWN STAGE, toward the audience.

R. R. C. C. L. C. L.

NOTE.—The text of this play is correctly reprinted from the original authorized acting edition, without change. The introduction has been carefully prepared by an expert, and is the only part of this book protected by copyright.

MEG'S DIVERSION.

ACT I.

Scene.—*The parlor of* JEREMY CROW'S *farm-house—the apartment is well furnished, yet with much of the farm-house style.*

CROW *and* CORNELIA *are discovered, the latter fashionably attired for traveling.*

Crow. (*at table*, R. C.—L. *of table*) Well, lass, you look well fed and thriving, and though I'm no judge of edication, I dare say you're becoming quite accomplished like. Squire Merton has promised to send in a pianoforte, to stand in that there recess ; so that you can practize your veryations and scaly things when you come home for a day or two. Let's see ! you're learning Italian, French, Jollick——

Cornelia. (*putting on her bonnet before glass*, R.) Logic, Moral Philosophy, Deportment, and many other things, papa.

Crow. Papa ! that gets over me—papa ! That ever I, Jerry Crow, farmer, should be called papa ! but I suppose it's all right, as I'm to have the presumptuous heir to a baronacy for a son-in-law.

Corn. Has Ashley told you when that is to be, papa ?

Crow. As soon as his uncle, who inherited an asthma, and the rest of the entailed property, dies ; he objects to the squire marrying "below par," as the pompous old aristocrat calls you. Now I consider edication is making you very much above pa, and fitting you for the envious position to which a marriage with Ashley Merton, Esq., will elevate you.

Corn. Well done, *mon père ;* but grammar hardly *comme il faut.* How strange it seems, though ; a young lady of my age sent to boarding-school, and her schooling paid by her husband that is to be.

Crow. It's only like buying the carcase of a house, and furnishing it to your own taste.

Corn. Oh ! now you've upset all by your coarseness.

Crow. (*rising*) Bless her ; she's found out her father's coarse.

There's the first good effect of edication. But I'm nous-y eh, Nell? Many a man would have thrown up his cards with such a hand as mine; but I've played on, and kept up the impression that I was rich in trumps.

Corn. But you are rich, papa, are you not?

Crow. Sit down, Nell; it's only right you should be undeceived. (*they sit*) I'm in Queer-street, and that's the truth.

Corn. (R.) Queer-street! where's that?

Crow. (R. C.) I'm *not* rich; to be sure I have the reputation of farming my own freehold, and I haven't felt bound to tell people that my farm has been for many years mortgaged to its full value, so that in fact if I was wound up I couldn't go on.

Corn. You astonish me! I have boasted to all our young ladies that you owned the largest farm in the county.

Crow. Well, you can still boast; it does no harm. If I can but get my two girls well married, I shall have reaped the crop for which I have tilled; and then, if my rich sons-in-law won't back me up, I must disgrace them by being sold up.

Corn. Oh, horrible! it will disgrace *me*, papa.

Crow. Of course it will, and very soon, too, unless I can borrow two thousand pounds to pay arrears of interest; and that's what I call being in Queer-street.

Corn. Do you not know anybody who might, could, would or should lend you the money?

Crow. Only one, and he might, could, and won't.

Corn. Who is that?

Crow. Jasper Pidgeon.

Corn. The carpenter?

Crow. The carpenter. His uncle has died abroad and left him considerable property, when he didn't look for a shilling, for his brother Roland was the old man's favorite—brought up by him as a gentleman with expectations—but, by George, he doesn't get a blessed fraction.

Corn. And have you asked that simpleton, Jasper, to do it?

Crow. I have; but to use his own unedicated words, he "didn't seem to see the pull!" The truth is, I have no security to offer.

Corn. Then it's a hopeless case?

Crow. No, it isn't, if your sister Meg will assist me; the fellow is head-over-ears in love with her.

Corn. Plebeian individual! Dear papa, you would never think of espousing her to a mechanic? (*rising*)

Crow. (*rising*) There you go! there you go! I don't want her to "espouse" him, as you call it; but if we could only get her to let him suppose that he might be an accepted beau, I am sure he would readily buy my consent by the loan I want.

Corn. (R.) Margaret doesn't care anything for him, does she?

Crow. (L.) Lord, she is so full of coltish skittishness, plaguing the

poor simpleton out of the little sense there is in his glue-pot of a head—in fact, Jasper Pidgeon is Meg's diversion!

Corn. Then, we must persuade her it would be a good joke to let him think she's *fiancée* to him.

Crow. Feearncy? Oh, I know what you mean—humbug him to any extent! Hush! here she is.

MEG, *with a basket of eggs, runs in door,* R.

Meg. (*down* C.) Fourteen eggs this morning! where's Corny? Ah, there she is, as large as life. (*puts down her hat and basket on table,* R.) Oh, you dear, pretty fine lady of a sister, how thoroughbred you look! Going away again to school?—ha, ha, to school! "A was an archer and shot at a frog!" What's French for frog? Is it masculine or feminine? Answer me, Miss, without hesitation, or I'll complain to your French master.

Corn. (R.) Oh, Margaret, don't be so obstreperous!

Meg. (C.) There's a word! oh my!—obstreperous! Father calls it "obstroporous," don't you, daddy?

Corn. He's most indiscriminate in his vowels.

Crow. (*aside,* L.) Now my vowels arn't right!

Corn. (*to* MEG) How *frivole* you are, dear.

Meg. Here we are again—"*frivole!*" *Parlez vous Francais? qu'est ce que c'est toujours jamais paddy-whack?* Ha! ha! ha! give us all French, or all English, Corny.

Crow. Don't be so infernally flighty!

Meg. There, that's English—such as it is—but what's the matter, Corny, dear? you look out of sorts; don't mind me; I won't be *frivole* if you don't like it, for I do love my sister, and admire her too! Forgive my nonsense, won't you, dear? (*kisses her*)

Crow. (L.) Lord bless you, Meg, she doesn't mind, no more do I; we have just been splitting our sides about your cracking your jokes on Jasper Pidgeon. I do enjoy it and that's the truth.

Meg. (C.) Poor Jasper; but doesn't he take it good-naturedly! What do you think, Corny? The other day I pinned a duster to his coat-tail, and as he went home the boys began to shout "what a tail our cat's got," and then he found it and hunted the boys for having put it there—I was never suspected, ha! ha!

Corn. I'm told he has a *penchant* for you.

Meg. *Penchant!* The idea of Jasper having a French sensation. Well, I think he is fond of me. Oh, I could have a lover if I liked, as well as my lady sister.

Corn. (R.) It would be an exquisite diversion to make him believe you loved him.

Crow. (L.) It would, and that's the truth; for the impudent fellow told somebody the other day, who told me the day after, that love was like water to you, and your heart was like a duck's back.

Meg. Well, you know, the duck's back was clever.

Crow. But he needn't have called you marble—no by-the-bye, "stone" was the word ; he said you was a precious stone.

Meg. Does the young slanderer talk of me in that way? He shall have the stone back again. I'll make him believe that I'm dying of love for him.

Crow. Ha ! ha ! and let him suppose that I set my face against it ; eh, Nell?

Corn. Yes, to see what the simpleton will do.

Meg. Oh, he's not such a simpleton as you think ; he can give a rub if he likes ; but he'll take anything from me, and would it be quite right to take advantage of that weakness?

Crow. Pooh, pooh, it will take him down a peg, if you just keep up the game for a week or two.

Corn. Yes, do, and write me full particulars. I shall enjoy the fun as much as though I were here to see it.

Meg. Poor Jasper !

Crow. He deserves it—you know that.

Meg. He has a very tender heart, I know that.

Crow. Hang it, Meg ! don't go and really fall in love.

Meg. Oh, no fear of that.

Corn. Now do it to oblige me ; there's a darling.

Meg. I will, Corny ; I'd do anything in the world for *you*.

Corn. Stone as you are ?

Meg. The monster, to set about such a report as that ! I'll have no mercy on him.

Crow. Ha, ha, ha ! Well, Meg does cheer me up with her frolics, and that's the truth.

Meg. Yes, dad ; I'm so "*frivole*," ain't I ? (*a loud single knock at door in flat, which makes them start*)

Crow. Bless us, and save us !

Corn. *Bon Dieu !*

Meg. It's Jasper ; he always knocks as if he'd thrown a brick at the door. (*opens door in flat*)

JASPER *appears, in his holiday suit, holding a parcel in his hand.*

Meg. (*up stage*, R. C.) Oh, what a swell !

Jasp. (*up stage* C.) Out for the day. D'ye like this style ?

Meg. How genteel !

Jasp. Well, it's neat and unpresuming, isn't it? Oh, lor ! there's Miss Cornelian, I declare ! (*goes down to her*, R. C.—MEG *remains up*, R. C.) 'Pon my word, I'm glad to see you, Miss Crow, senior ; you don't look half so peaky as you used to. Of course you're still delicate and lady-like ; but I mean you look fresh and wholesome.

Corn. (R.) Wholesome—the idea !

Jasp. No, I don't mean you look wholesome, but—(*drops parcel*) I beg your pardon, that's a little present for—(*sees* CROW *and crosses over to him*, L. C.) How are you, governor?

Crow. (L.) I'm glad to see you, Jasper. (*shakes hands*—JASPER *drops parcel*)

Jasp. (L. C.) Then it's lucky I dropped in—isn't it? I say, somebody important has arrived. (*puts parcel on table at back* L.)

Meg. (R. C., *up stage*) So it seems.

Jasp. No; I mean—who do you think has come down to stay with me? Why, brother Roly! Such a noble-looking fellow! his moustachios alone command respect—at right angles with his nose, bless you—*à la Hemperor.*

Meg. Like pussy's whiskers.

Jasp. And such a gift of the gab—there—talk about flowency—but it's the style, mind you!

Corn. (R.) *Distingué?*

Jasp. (R. C.) Distinctly! And he's a perfect Tower of Babel in languages; why there was an Italian organ-grinder came before the window this morning, and to hear the no-mistaky way in which Roly directed him, in his own language, to go to the—I beg pardon, ladies, I was going to say, the devil. (*crosses to* R. C.)

Corn. Oh!

Jasp. Devil-o is what he called it, Miss Cornelian.

Corn. My name is Cornelia.

Jasp. Ah! so it is; though why and wherefore, I never could guess.

Meg. (*who has come down* L. C.) She was named after the necklace her godmother gave her, of course.

Jasp. Well, my godfather gave me a silver spoon, but they didn't christen me "Spoony."

Meg. No; your sponsors didn't do the correct thing.

Jasp. Correct! Now, that's sourcaustic; but I don't mind you, Meg—you're always giving me a dig. But look out when Roland comes!—talk about Rolands for Olives—eh, governor?

Crow. (L.) Well, bring him here to amuse us.

Jasp. (R. C.) Oh! he's not particular as to his company; I'll bring him.

Corn. (R.) And the mustache *recherché?*

Jasp. Ah! your remarks are French polished—a cut above me that; though this morning I partly translated a Scotch song into Latin.

Meg. (L. C.) Who said "learned pig?"—that's very rude!

Jasp. (*expostulating*) Now, governor——

Crow. I didn't say it; but bless us and save us—a carpenter learning Latin!

Meg. The learned gentleman of the bench.

Corn. Favor us with your *chanson* in the dead language.

Meg. Dead! Yes, if Jasper sings, he'll murder it.

Jasp. Go it, Meg! Well, I saw in a book that *corpus* was Latin for "body," so it immediately occurred to me to adopt it to music. (*sings*)

"Gin a corpus meet a corpus, coming through the rye,
Gin a corpus kiss a corpus, need a corpus cry."

All laugh—MEG *crosses at back to* R. C.; CROW *goes up to window.*

Well, that's the way Miss Cornelian speaks French.

Meg. (*aside to* CORNELIA) There, I told you he could give a rub.

Crow. There's Merton waiting to escort you to the coach, Nell.

Jasp. (L.) Talking about him reminds me to tell you that I made an investment yesterday.

Crow. (*at table*, R. C.) You mean that you bought a new waistcoat, or——

Meg. (R. C.) A straight-waistcoat.

Jasp. (*expostulating*) Now, governor.

Crow. (*pointing to* MEG) *She* said straight-waistcoat—go on.

Jasp. You know Eytem, of the firm of Pepper and Gulp, the Exeter lawyers?—well, he comes to me and says he's got Mrs. Netwell's little estate to sell for three thousand pound—dash'd if I didn't clinch it, there and then.

Meg. Who said "fools and their money?"

Jasp. (L.—*expostulating*) Now, governor!

Crow. (*coming down* C.) I didn't say so; but, my lad, I think you've put your foot in it.

Jasp. No, I shan't even put my foot in it; for I sold it to-day for four thousand—ha, ha! Had you there, governor! Who do you think bought it?

Corn. Some madman, I should think.

Jasp. (*crossing to* L. C.) Yes, your lover, Hashley Mutton, Esq.

Corn. "Ashley Merton," if you please, sir.

Crow. (L. *to* JASPER) How queer you are in your vowels!

Jasp. Now, governor—well, a thousand clear shan't be such a bad spec, eh?

Crow. Ah! luck's better than brains; but I think Ashley has acted rashly.

Corn. The estates join; he knows what he is about, papa. But I mustn't keep him waiting. *Bon jour*, Mr. Pidgeon. (*aside to him*) Don't trifle with poor Margaret.

Jasp. Eh?

Corn. (*goes to* MEG, R. C.) Margaret, *au revoir!* I shall see you again in a month. Don't come to see me, dear; the young ladies are such quizzes.

Meg. (R.) Ah! you're ashamed of homely Meg—well, I don't wonder at it; but they can't quiz my own sister, she's better than any of them. (*kisses her*) Good bye, darling!

Crow. (*at back, putting on hat, and taking up a bonnet-box*) I'll see you on to the road.

Corn. (*aside to* MEG) Don't forget your diversion.

Exeunt CROW *and* CORNELIA, *door in flat.*

Meg. (R. C.) Isn't she a pretty creature?

Jasp. (L. C.) Well, I'm not given to soap, or I'd venture upon saying I know a prettier. (*fetching parcel from table at back*, L.) Now, look here, Meg; I've been and took the liberty of buying you a shawl—(*gives parcel*)—'cause in that easter wind on Easterly Sunday, you looked as cold as a stone.

Meg. Ah! you think me as cold as a stone, do you?

Jasp. Put the thing aside—don't undo it till I'm gone.

Meg. (*puts it in drawer*, R.) How am I ever to return it?

Jasp. Return it—nonsense—keep it!

Meg. (*coming forward*, R. C.) I'm sure the shawl will increase the warmth of my feeling, but you don't expect it will make me love you, do you?

Jasp. (L. C.) Oh, no; I'm not such a fool as that comes to; you are too superior an article for me, and I know it—you don't care two-pence for me, and I know it—and if I love you, Meg, it's because I can't help it, in spite of all your sky-larking.

Meg. Oh Jasper; I'm not a stone!

Jasp. Yes you are, Meg—a precious stone.

Meg. You don't believe I've a heart for anybody.

Jasp. (*with a little emotion*) Yes; when Mr. Wright comes, I shall have the—the undescribable pleasure of seeing him walk off with you, and I only hope that Wright will be up to the mark, and make you a good husband.

Meg. Oh, go along, now, do! Don't say such things, don't. Jasper, I care for nobody in the world but you; I'm a weak, foolish girl, I know, but your charms have conquered.

Jasp. My what?

Meg. Don't you see that I adore you?

Jasp. Meg!

Meg. Now despise me! It's like all the men—as soon as they know a poor girl dotes on them they trample her under foot. (*she pretends to cry, and sits* R.)

Jasp. You—you take my breath away! Don't joke—don't joke with me, Meg, pray don't.

Meg. Joke! There you go! that's right! trample on me—dance on my tenderest feelings—accuse me of joking—do!

Jasp. You mean to say you—oh lor!—l-love me?

Meg. Oh, don't I?

Jasp. And I ignorant——

Meg. No doubt of it.

Jasp. Look here, Meg. You are too good to deceive a poor fellow who worships the ground you sit upon. Say you love me, in three words, and I'll believe you.

Meg. In three words—don't I love you! No, that's four. Never mind—keep in "don't." But why did I tease you so, Jasper, if I didn't?—answer me that. (*rises and comes forward*, R. C.)

Jasp. Well, if that's a proof of love, I'm convinced on the spot. But, Meg—dear Meg, you never gave me the faintest hint.

Meg. Because I thought father would never consent.

Jasp. And do you think he will now?

Meg. I don't know—ask him.

Jasp. I will. Lord! it gives me such a palpitation, because it's come on me in such a clap-of-lightning way; I've often gone so far as to dream of you, but I never dreamed to such a pitch as to—oh! may I—excuse me if it's coming it too strong—may I mortise our little understanding with a—excuse me for giving it a name—a kiss?

Meg. Oh, I couldn't; 'pon my word, I couldn't. I'll bank it for you till father consents. You may kiss the back of my hand, if you please; it's just as good. (*offers her hand*)

Jasp. Well, that's a matter of opinion; but I've a lively imagination, so upon these lips (*kissing her hand*) which matter-of-fact people would call fingers, I swear you've made me as happy as any fellow can be, without going ramping mad.

Meg. (*going to cupboard*, R.) Won't you take something after your fright? Have a glass of wine.

Jasp. I will, and pledge myself to you. A glass of wine from your hands is something to smack my own lips over.

Meg. (*fills glass and gives it*) Make haste! here's father coming.

Jasp. (C.) I was going to make a few pre—pre—liminary remarks——

Meg. Make haste!

Jasp. (*tips it off*) Bah—booh—phit! Why, that's vinegar! (*crosses over to fireplace*, R., *spitting*)

Meg. (*smelling the bottle*) Oh, lor! so it is. Forgive me—forgive me, Jasper—my own one! I have done for you!

Jasp. (R.) No, but you've pickled me; but you didn't do it on purpose, did you?

Meg. (L.) Oh, Jasper! can you think me such a stone?

Jasp. It wouldn't be the first trick you'd played me; but I don't think you'd do such a thing now. (MEG *replaces bottle and glass in cupboard*—JASPER *crosses to* L.)

Enter CROW, *door in flat.*

Crow. There, I've handed Nell over to the care of her lover; no

doubt he's bursting to say some tender things, for a lover's mouth is full of sweets—isn't it, Jasper?

Jasp. (L.) Well, there's a slight acidity about mine.

Crow. (C.) Ah, but you arn't a lover.

Jasp. That's all you know about it, governor.

Crow. Meg, you're my secretary; drop a line to Eytem, the lawyer; say he shall hear from me next week—that's all; here's pen and paper.

Meg. All right, dad. (*takes paper, &c., crosses to* L., *and speaks aside to* JASPER) Speak now, dear, dearer, dearest Jasper! speak forcibly—put it strong. (*smothers her laughter, and* exit L. *door*)

Crow. (R. C.) Soh, young Pidgeon, you've got possession of your property?

Jasp. (L. C.) A decent slice of it. But, upon my word, I can't help feeling for poor Roly; my conscience won't let me sleep if I don't do something handsome for him.

Crow. Pooh, pooh! if your brother's a dashing fellow, he'll find a rich wife; as for you, keep your money, and *you* can afford to marry who you like—think of that!

Jasp. No, I couldn't; because, put it this way—suppose her father wouldn't make himself agreeable in the matter?

Crow. Money is a strong argument to the parential ear.

Jasp. Then let it argufy with *you*, governor. I love Meg! There, it's out!

Crow. (*retreating* R.) What!

Jasp. And she loves me. (CROW *approaches him*) Stop, stop—don't kick me out just yet. She's as dutiful as she is beautiful, and won't give me any encouragement without your consent.

Crow. (*takes chair and sits* R. C.) And am I to suppose you are now asking it?

Jasp. Down as a hammer! Draw it mild, there's a good governor. I feel as if I was waiting for an enlightened jury to bring in a verdict of life and death.

Crow. (*folding his arms*) Now, look you here, Pidgeon. That girl is the apple-pip of my eye. I have had hopes that she, like her sister, might pair off with a aristocrat; she ought to, and that's the truth. Now you coolly ask me to give up those hopes and hand her over to you—*you* ask it, who denied me a loan, a paltry assistance which would relieve me from much anxiety. Now, that refusal of yours sticks in my throat.

Jasp. (*getting chair and sitting* L. C.) Well, if that is the obstacle to your swallowing me govenor, cough it up at once. You see, lending to Jack, Tom, or Bill is one thing, but lending to the individual we are expecting to call father is another.

Crow. Never shall it be said that I sell my child for a paltry two thousand pound!

Jasp. Certainly not! and never shall it be said that I buy Meg.

You shall have the paltry two thousand, governor, whether you consent or no.

Crow. Your generosity knocks me off my legs. (*rising*) Setting money out of the question, I will not oppose your visits.

Jasp. (*rising*) Then I lend the money and you consent; but there's neither buying nor selling.

Crow. (*shakes hands*) Your hand—when can I have the money?

Jasp. (L. C.) The paltry two thousand? Whenever you like. When can I have Meg?

Crow. (R. C.) Whenever she likes. I won't interfere in her arrangements. Here she is—don't say anything to her about the money, or she'll fancy she's sold.

Jasp. D'ye take me for a fool?

Crow. (R., *aside*) I do.

Enter MEG, *from door* L., *with a letter in one hand, and in the other, which she conceals behind her, is a paper.*

Meg. (*crossing at back*) Dad, here's your letter. (*gives it;* JASPER *beckons her—she comes,* C.)

Jasp. (L., *aside to* MEG) Done it—right as a plummet! Oh, Meg! what a happy day this is for me. (*goes up*)

Crow. (R., *aside to* MEG) Meg, you've done it, right as a trivet! —keep it up—rare diversion! (CROW *goes up stage*) Now I'll post this, and meet Squire Merton, who will most likely come back with me. (*aside to* JASPER, *who is up stage,* L.) Let me have the—humph—in a hour.

Jasp. (*aside to him*) Oh, the paltry two—all right! (exit CROW, *door in flat*)

Jasp. (*comes forward,* L.) Meg—I may go so far as to say, *my* Meg, now—it's done! he has consented—we may consider ourselves engaged.

Meg. (R. C.) Oh, isn't it nice when you come to think of it? Whatever is the matter with your coat behind?

Jasp. (L. C.) Rumpled?

Meg. No, your collar's sticking up; such a fright; turn round and I'll put it down. (*she pins on his collar a paper on which is written in large print letters* "ENGAGED.") Keep still! there, that's evidently better—anybody can see that.

Jasp. Mind, I shan't tell anybody I'm engaged yet. (*turns with his back to the audience*)

Meg. No, there's not the slightest occasion.

Jasp. Not even Roly, though I'm sure he'll be as pleased as Punch to think I am so lucky; and I really don't know what there is in me for a girl like you, who could have picked from the whole parish, to take a fancy to; but if ever I play with your feelings, Meg,

then I hope I may lose you; and that's as much as saying I wish I may die. May I draw the 'foresaid kiss out of the bank now?

Meg. Wait till interest accumulates.

Jasp. Then it must be compound interest, because I could make use of any amount just now. (ROLAND *appears at window in flat*) Oh, lor! here is brother Roly.

Roland. (*outside, at window*) Soh, I've found you, have I? Ah, in good company, too. (JASPER *runs and opens the door*)

ROLAND **enters** *and comes down* L.

Pardon my intrusion, Miss Rook——

Jasp. (C.) Crow, Roly, Crow!

Roland. I would if I could; but I can't.

Jasp. This is Miss Margaret Crow, the youngest daughter of Farmer Crow, Esquire. (ROLAND *bows*)

Meg. (R., *curtseys*) At your service, Mr. Turtle.

Roland. (*crosses to* C.) Turtle! My name is Pidgeon.

Jasp. (L.) Lord! don't you see that's her fun, Roly? You'll relish it when you get as seasoned as I am.

Roland. Oh, we'll get used to one another, never fear; she'll find I'm as fond of joking as she is. (*to* MEG) You must take me over the farm; show me the pigs and chickens—(live eggs and bacon)—lambs skipping about the fields—suggestive and poetical—makes one dream of mint sauce, Daphne and Phillis, green peas and gravy, to say nothing of pastorals suggested by the pretty guide. (*sings*)

> "Father's a farmer, sir, she said—sir, she said.
> I'm glad that I came here, my pretty maid!"

Meg. (*sings*) "Nobody axed you, sir, she said!"

Jasp. (*aside to* ROLAND) That's good, isn't it? I told you she was sharp, didn't I? (*crosses to* C.—*aside to* MEG) He's clever, isn't he?

Roland. (L., *seeing paper on* JASPER'S *back*) Holloa, Jasper, you're engaged, are you?

Jasp. (C., *turning sharply round*) How do you know that? Did you read it in the newspaper?

Roland. Yes; in a back impression.

Jasp. (*aside to* MEG) Isn't he artful? (*to* ROLAND) You read it in my phizmahogany, I suppose?

Roland. And behind your back.

Jasp. Ha! ha! behind my back—a queer direction!

Roland. Yes, it is a queer direction.

Jasp. (C.) Well, you've hit the right nail on the head anyhow. (*aside to* MEG) I think we may as well tell him. (*to* ROLAND)

Your sagacity, brother, is something marvelous. I am engaged, and I'm proud to say to this dear girl—though mum! 'cause we don't want it known yet; friends are apt to make a joke of it.

Roland. (L.) Yes; it's so deuced kind of friends to do that, isn't it?

Jasp. (C.) Don't bottle up your emotions, Ro'; congratulate a fellow, won't you?

Roland. To be sure. The Pidgeons ought to feel proud of the marked distinction conferred on one of the family, though I shan't forget, on some future opportunity, to pick a crow with the young lady.

Jasp. Pick a crow—that's good; but, considering we are Pidgeons, I would say, avoid jocularity about names; you know, Roly, people might call us——

Roland. Carrier pidgeons.

Jasp. (C.) Or knock us down, and call us tumblers.

Meg. (R.) Oh, I don't see any harm in a jest.

Roland. (L.) Nor in making a man a jest book?

Meg. Some people have a peculiar talent for spoiling jokes.

Roland. (*crossing to* C.) Well, I won't spoil one; retaliation is my system, and I can be most unmerciful—even to a pretty girl.

Jasp. (*to* MEG) He's down on you, because you called him Mr. Turtle. Give it him again, Meg, while I just run home to get something I promised the governor. I shan't be long. Don't be afraid of Roly; he's playful, but there's no vice in him. (*running up* C., *and off door in flat*)

Roland. (L. C.) And will you suffer him to go like that, Miss Crow?

Meg. (R. C.) He's not such a simpleton as to mind a joke.

Roland. But, evidently, your object is to make everybody think him a simpleton.

Meg. Oh, goodness! pray don't make a crime out of such a trifle.

Roland. No; but I fear that is not the worst of it. He considers himself engaged, does he not?

Meg. That's the joke.

Roland. Oh, that's the joke! But you don't consider you are engaged?

Meg. How absurd! Of course not.

Roland. Now, that is no joke; tearing that inscription from his heart—simpleton as you think him—may give him more pain than tearing the label from his back.

Meg. What a superior Sunday-school teacher you would make. Do give me a lesson.

Roland. (*aside*) I will; and one you won't easily forget.

Meg. People who can't tell jest from earnest deserve to be played upon.

Roland. Oh, you think so? Well, shake hands; I won't be angry. Something convinces me that whoever is lucky enough to catch you ought to be a happy fellow; but poor Jasper is not the man. Now, we are friends, are we not?

Meg. If you please; and I hope you won't think me cruel to your brother, for I do like him, and I'll beg his pardon—you see if I won't. My making him believe we were engaged, was more to divert my sister than myself.

Roland. Oh, your sister; she's at Madame Blanche's seminary, isn't she? I knew madame in Paris, and mean, when I have time, to look her up in Exeter; and—who knows?—I may there have the pleasure of making your sister's acquaintance.

Meg. Such a dear girl! Now she *is* a girl to admire if you like; but recollect, you mustn't fall in love with her, or Squire Merton will shoot you like a partridge. Oh, talk of the——

MERTON *passes window and* enters *door in flat.*

Mert. (*down* C.) Your servant, Miss Exuberant. I'll wait here for your father, who is taking stock of his turkeys, and requires your assistance. (*turns and sees* ROLAND) Roland!

Roland. (L.) Soh, Philosopher Merton, you have not forgotten your comrade of the Boulevard?

Meg. (R.) Why, Mr. Merton, you never said you knew Jasper's brother, but since you are acquaintances, I'll leave you together, while I go and see what little turkeys are hatched. (*runs off, door in flat*)

Mert. (R. C.) You know, I imagine, what sort of footing I am on here?

Roland. (L. C.) About to amalgamate with the Crow family, eh?

Mert. Well, that will not be a surprise to you, who know my favorite theory—begin at the beginning, *create*, so to speak. I found in Miss Crow a young mind—uncultivated, indeed, but untampered with, and I conceived the project of forming it after my own theory. Why should not the female brain be braced by tonic education to masculine tension? (*sits* R. *of table*)

Roland. (*sits* L. *of table*, R. C.) But her heart——

Mert. I should wish my wife's heart trained, so to speak, even as my steed is trained to its *manége*—as I would break a horse, so would I break my wife's heart.

Roland. What?

Mert. I mean break in her heart, and break in her head; perhaps that's ambiguous—I merely mean that her thoughts and affections should, with the loadstone's verticity, turn ever to me as her guiding point.

Roland. Sublime in theory, ridiculous in practice! Love is the

only professor who can teach—what do you call it?—verticity. Has she any love for you?

Mert. Well, I fancy even that I am creating; and as one tests a gun before purchase, so I should like to prove her heart.

Roland. Yes, I've heard of such things as bursting hearts.

Mert. An experimental idea strikes me; you are personable enough for my purpose; do me a service—profess love—test her for me, will you?

Roland. An eccentric request, but when I see this spirited lady, I'll try if she's above proof, though I have first a little affair of my own with the saucy sister; she has turned my brother into public ridicule, and I mean to revenge the family insult *lege talionis.*

Mert. (*rises*) Serve her right! Why, even I, Ashley Merton, am not secure from her rustic satire. Your brother, whom I believe to be a very worthy youth in his station, though, by-the-bye, he annoys me by calling me "hashed mutton," which I wish you'd correct him of, your brother and I have had a transaction to-day.

Roland. (*forward,* L. C.) He bought Mrs. Netwell's estate.

Mert. (L. C.) And I have given him a thousand pounds for his bargain. Now, why did I do this?

Roland. Because you coveted your neighbor's goods.

Mert. Because I am not satisfied with the house erected by my ancestors. I wish to build—to design—to create, so to speak, an edifice for myself.

Roland. Then why didn't you buy of Mrs. Netwell?

Mert. Simply because she would not sell her land to *me.* The fact is, the fair widow and I are not on a commercial footing since it has become known that I am modeling Cornelia Crow to be Mistress of Merton Hall. Well, I confess that I did previously entertain some idea of elevating Mrs. Netwell to that post, and she is not without qualifications; but a widow, pah! Had she been a widow of my own creating now—no, by-the-bye, that couldn't be.

Roland. Unless you had killed her husband.

Mert. Poor thing, how mortified she will be when she learns the Grange has fallen into my hands. I wouldn't meet her now for worlds.

Crow. (*without*) Don't attack me, ma'am; I know nothing about the affair. (CROW *appears at door in flat*) Oh, Mr. Merton is here; now you can have it out with him.

Enter CROW, *followed by* MRS. NETWELL, *door in flat*—MRS. NETWELL *goes down* C.—CROW *remains at back,* L. C., MERTON, *extreme* R., ROLAND, R. C.

Merton. (*aside to* ROLAND) By Nemesis, here she is; she'll create a scene. (ROLAND *goes up stage*)

Mrs. N. (L. C.) Soh, Mr. Merton, I am just informed that you

have outwitted me, and obtained possession of Netwell, knowing that my object in selling it was to prevent you—*you*, above all persons, from acquiring it.

Merton. (R. C.) My dear Sophia——

Mrs. N. Oh, sir, you have acted in a very manly manner—very; you will enjoy your triumph, no doubt—you are——

Crow. (*coming down* C.) Stop, stop! Situated as I am, ma'am, it would be most hurtful to my feelings to hear Mr. Merton blown up—I mean run down. Allow me to retire into the stock-yard. (*goes up*)

Roland. (*up stage*, R.) I'll join you, and fraternize with the pigs. I'm the brother of Jasper Pidgeon.

Crow. (L. C.) Bless me, how d'ye do? let's look at your moustachios; I've heard them extensively spoke of—come along!

Exeunt CROW *and* ROLAND, *door in flat.*

Mert. (R.) Then, madam, you have followed me for the sole purpose of loading me with reproaches?

Mrs. N. (L.) No, sir, I did not follow you. Mr. Crow, whom I met, informed me of your trick—now, Mr. Merton, you are a gentleman——

Mert. Granted.

Mrs. N. And I am an unprotected widow.

Mert. Unprotected! can I do anything?

Mrs. N. Do anything? have you not acted like an enemy? What have I done to you, that you should be my enemy? (*wipes her eyes*)

Mert. Good heavens! I am nobody's enemy—least of all yours! Have we not been brought up together—friends in youth—friends in maturity—friends in—no, we'll stop at maturity.

Mrs. N. And yet, as you well know, my only motive in selling my property was to remove to some spot where, at least, I might be spared the pain of seeing you lead home a—a— Ashley, you have not behaved well to me; you know it, for you are a man of sagacity, not to say intellect. I have good reason to entertain some little womanly resentment.

Mert. Resentment! what is there to resent?

Mrs. N. Do you ask that—you? Did you not deliberately throw yourself in my widowed path—dazzle by your superior attainments—allure by your fascinations—

Mert. (*aside*) This woman is far above the average in intelligence.

Mrs. N. And when you had created a sympathy—I admit it to you as a man of refined sentiment—which I had never before known, did I not suddenly hear that you had adopted a farmer's daughter to train for the position which—I appeal to you as a man of honor—you had given me reason to anticipate as my own?

Mert. Mrs. Netwell—Sophia—I confess I was culpable; I ought

to have known that the gallantries of a man of my—as you suggest—intellect, are calculated to make a more than ordinary impression. You are, to say the least, an appreciative woman, and I'll tell you what I'll do. You shall have Netwell Grange again at the price you sold it; the odd thousand I will cheerfully forfeit as a fine for past indiscretion. Will that suffice?

Mrs. N. I accept your offer; but, as I said, I cannot remain here; don't persuade me—my heart is broken! Oh, Ashley! that heart was so entirely yours, that you might have molded it as you pleased.

Mert. Might I, indeed? I wish I'd known that; it is my ambition to create for myself.

Mrs. N. And as for my little son——

Mert. There, you see, is a blow to my ambition.

Mrs. N. But what grand original designs—I ask you as a man of genius—might be drawn on the unsullied surface of his young mind?

Mert. That's true; there's a delightful task for somebody. Will you take my arm, Sophia? and I will venture to offer my advice on the creation of a philosophic taste in youth. (MRS. NETWELL *takes his arm as they are going up*)

Enter JASPER *and* ROLAND, *door in flat.*

Jasp. (C.) Of all the ill-mannered beasts, the people in this village are the beastliest—everybody is shouting after me. (*sees* MERTON) Beg your pardon, Mr. Hashley Mutton, but do you see anything in my appearance to laugh at? (*to* MRS. NETWELL) or do you, ma'am?

Mert. (*at back*, R. C.) I see you are engaged.

Jasp. Confound it, now you're at it! How do you know I'm engaged? How do all the other fools know it? How does the infant school know it? Is it writ on my back?

Roland. (*down* L.) It is. (*takes the paper from his back and shows it*)

Jasp. (*thunderstruck*) And—was—that on my—back?

Mrs. N. (*up stage*, R. C.) It was.

Jasp. (C.) And she—yes, I remember now; she pretended to put my collar to rights. She did it!

Mert. (R. C.) Ah, my mechanical young friend, you've two important things to learn; don't call me "hash'd mutton," and don't lay yourself open to practical jokes; the fact is, you've been making love to Margaret, which you might have known would only create diversion.

Jasp. (*sadly*) I might!

Roland. (L.) Never mind, Jasper, she shan't get off scot free; we will have our joke.

Jasp. No—no—I shall never—never—(*unable to proceed, he sits in a chair,* C.)

Roland. (*aside*) Poor fellow! poor fellow! (*turns up stage,* L.)

Mert. I am going to protect this lady through the meadows, for I noticed Crow's black bull was untethered. (*to* ROLAND) Pidgeon, I want to make an appointment with you. (*aside to him*) to arrange that test I proposed—you know what I mean?

Roland. Exeter, to wit.

Exeunt MERTON *and* MRS. NETWELL, *door in flat.*

Roland. (*to* JASPER, *slapping him on the back*) Cheer up, old fellow, never take a joke to heart. (*runs off, door in flat*)

Jasp. (*wiping his eyes*) The joke—no, but it's all over—the delicious dream is over—she—she—doesn't love me! What a double-distilled fool I was to think she did. She's too good for me, but she might have told me so in some other way than this. Oh Meg, Meg, no more *my* Meg! if you'd known how it would have crushed a poor fellow you wouldn't have gone and done it! (*sobs*)

Enter MEG, *door in flat.*

Meg. Well, I declare, if your brother and Squire Merton aren't talking together as thick as thieves!—the Pidgeon's are mounting! (*putting her hand on* JASPER'S *shoulder*) Why, Jasper, you look quite pale.

Jasp. Yes, Meg, I have had a sort of turn, and I dare say I deserved it. I made a stupid mistake, but yours was a very good joke, Meg—a very ludicrous joke—one can't—ha! ha!—help laughing.

Meg. (*looking in his face*) And real tears are trickling down your cheek!

Jasp. Nothing of the sort.

Meg. (R. C.) They are, though. (*seeing paper on the floor*) Oh, now I know what has annoyed you. It was very, very wrong of me, but I beg your pardon.

Jasp. No, don't beg my pardon; it was a delicate way of telling me that I was a presumptive fellow, and I'm not in the least annoyed, Meg; but I wish that paper had been a pitch plaster on my mouth, and done for me. I feel very much as if I didn't care to live, but that's no fault of yours. Good bye, Meg! (*picks up paper and puts it in his breast pocket*) I shan't come again, but you'll find some other diversion. Good-bye, I shall clear out of this place at once. Exit, *door in flat.*

Meg. Poor Jasper! Why did I do this? He seems dreadfully cut up. I've behaved very cruelly, and how meekly he bears it. I'll call him back, I will, and beg him to forgive me. (*runs to the door, and is met by* EYTEM)

Eytem. (*at door*) Is Jeremy Crow here?

Meg. (L. *of door*) It appears not, sir.

Eytem. Are you one of Crow's girls?

Meg. I am one of Mr. Crow's young ladies.

Eytem. Young ladies! what next?

Meg. Middle-aged ladies, I suppose, sir.

Eytem. Pshaw! I don't come here to crack jokes. My name's Eytem.

Meg. (*coming forward*, L.) A serious Eytem.

Eytem. (*coming forward*, R.) Hold your tongue, girl! Pepper, Gulp & Eytem, Solicitors, of Exeter, are not to be trifled with. There is something in this letter (*gives it*) which requires his instantaneous attention.

Meg. When he comes in I dare say he'll attend to it on the spot.

Eytem. He will if he wishes to remain on the spot long, Miss Flippant. You may tell him from Pepper, Gulp & Eytem—emphatically—that we have said in that letter neither more nor less than we mean. D'ye understand?

Meg. Emphatically—no!

Eytem. Our clients are resolved to foreclose unless your father pays the two thousand by twelve to-day—understand—to-day!

Meg. You're mad! my father owe two thousand pounds?

Eytem. That he does; and I am not mad.

Meg. Then my father is rich enough to pay it.

Eytem. Well, for a rich man he has been trying to raise money uncommonly hard; but as Pepper, Gulp & Eytem happen to know, every money-lender in Exeter objects to his security.

Meg. Mr. Eytem, you're standing there and uttering an untruth—you know you are. (CROW *passes window*)

Eytem. Thank you, miss; here comes your father—we'll see.

Enter CROW, *door in flat.*

Crow. (*down* C.) Oh, Pepper & Gollop, I have just posted a letter to you, naming to-morrow.

Eytem. You'll find by the letter that "young lady"—hem!—holds, that to-morrow won't do. Pepper & Gollop, as you call us, are not to be trifled with.

Crow. (*reads*) "By twelve o'clock!" That's sharp; but you shall have the money by twelve o'clock.

Meg. (L., *to* EYTEM) There; I told you so.

Eytem. (R.) I shall be close by for the next two hours. I have put up my mare at the Crown stables.

Meg. I was sure you had found a mare's nest.

Eytem. (*up* C.) You're a very forward young woman. Mr. Crow, I have to lodge a complaint; your daughter is wanting in

respect, and I request that you will teach her Pepper, Gulp & Eytem are not to be trifled with. Exit, *door in flat.*

Crow. (*seated at table*, R. C.) Where's Jasper Pidgeon?

Meg. (L. C.) Poor Jasper; we shall never see him again; he has found out my trick, and bid me good-bye forever.

Crow. (*rising, aghast*) What?

Meg. I'm sure he meant it, by his tone; the poor lad is heart-broken.

Crow. Then I'm ruined! (*sinks in arm-chair*)

Meg. Ruined?

Crow. Mad—unlucky girl—you've done it! Jasper was going to lend me two thousand pounds.

Meg. (L.) And—and was this why you asked me to decoy him into the belief——

Crow. (R.) That I gave my consent. It was the only way to draw the money out of his pocket, and if I don't have it in an hour, the farm and everything I call mine is lost. (*rising*) Go after him—bring him back! Promise him anything, but bring him back with the money! Let me only get that, then do what you please with him.

Meg. Oh, father, is this honest?

Crow. Bah! I'm not to be catechism'd by a girl. Go after him, I tell you.

Meg. Father, I can't do that.

Crow. Not to save us all from ruin?

Meg. Not to save us all from ruin. I have already behaved to him like a cruel, heartless girl; but it was in ignorance of what I was doing. (*a loud knock*) Ah, that's his knock!

Crow. I thought he'd come back again. Now do your best for us.

Meg. What I do shall be at the bidding of my conscience. Oh, father, don't let us be false to Jasper.

Crow. Open the door. (MEG *opens door and remains up stage*)

Enter JASPER, *door in flat, and down* C.

Jasp. (C.) I want just to speak to you, governor.

Crow. (R.) You can speak before my daughter.

Jasp. Oh, can I? (*dejectedly*) Well, govenor, I'm going away. This is no place for me. I'd nearly forgot that I gave my word you should have that money. (*giving a check*) There's a check. You'll find it all right, for I only paid it in yesterday.

Crow. Good lad! When do you want this?

Jasp. Name your own time, and send it directed to me "The Bush, Australia."

Crow. I'll give you bills at six and nine months before you go. Meg, where did that Eytem say I could find him?

Meg. (*down* L.) At the Crown.

Crow. (*going up*) I'll go there, and as I come back I must tether the black bull; they tell me he's loose in the six acre field. Thankee, young Pidgeon, thankee! **Exit,** *door in flat.*

Jasp. (L. C.) Once more, good-bye, Meg; I shall often think of you and your jokes.

Meg. (L. C.) Jasper, I have done with joking, and my greatest sorrow is that I have made a sport of your feelings—you who have acted so nobly—so—(*falling at his feet*)—Jasper, forgive me; my eyes are opened to my sin, for sin it was. Say you forgive me.

Jasp. Oh, don't! get up, do! I can't bear to see you in that way—it isn't natural. Forgive you—what for? Get up, or I shall think your are making a diversion of me again.

Meg. Then you must think me worthless indeed; yet I can scarcely ask you to believe one who has had no pity in her mirth—but——

Jasp. I won't say I forgive, bless'd if I do! Oh, get up, Meg—get up! (*lifts her up*) because I ought, on my knees, to ask *your* pardon for daring to think I could be more than a laughing-stock for you; to fancy you could love such a simple, rough fellow. I must have been a dribbling idiot.

Meg. I know you are rough, and simple, perhaps; but through that simplicity I admire a nobleness of heart which must accomplish all you desire—even love—yes, Jasper, *love;* and in that belief, and with all the truth which my lost mother tried to instill in my childish heart, I offer myself for—for your wife! If you reject me, the humiliation is deserved, for I have been a wayward, heedless girl—I am so no more; take or refuse, but believe me sincere.

Jasp. I do all that, Meg; and you know there can be no sunshine in my life like the thought that you really would one day be Mrs. Pidgeon; but the question is—for I've gained thirty years' experience in the last thirty minutes—can you love me?

Meg. Indeed, gratitude alone might——

Jasp. Aye, there it is. The substantial love I want is not made out of such veneer as gratitude. Bother gratitude! Now, look here, Meg; I won't take any advantage of you whilst you're under that impression; but think the matter over coolly—do, dear Meg—ask your heart a question or two; tell it that taking a husband may be on a long lease, and one ought to be sure that the taxes will not be too heavy. I'll tell you what I'll do. This day three months I'll put the question to you again, and then say truthfully and fearlessly whether you love me as a husband should be loved, or *vice versy*.

Meg. Always kind Jasper; but do you think if I were not sure of what was dawning here, (*places her hand on her heart*) any amount of gratitude would make me offer you a hand that you might not take as a pledge for all the rest?

Jasp. I do hope so; I do indeed. But as nothing is certain but death and quarter day, let us only be as we used to, till the day comes. Don't say a word about it to anybody—not even to brother Ro'.

Meg. Only to my father—I can't deceive him! and Jasper, (*looking down*) you—you—you may draw that little amount out of the bank now.

Jasp. (*kisses her*) The first time! Oh, it's like "sipping the necktie of the gods," as the song-book says; but what a remarkably short pleasure it is; never mind, the time may come when Lips and Company will be a bank that won't stop, draw on it as much as I will; and won't I draw—without any check! (*shouts heard without*) Holloa! there's a shindy in the farm yard!

Meg. (*going to door*) Oh, whatever has happened to father? here's your brother carrying him on his back.

Jasp. I hope Roly's not making an ass of himself—one in a family is quite enough. (*shouts again outside*)

Enter ROLAND, *door in flat, with* CROW *on his back; he places* CROW *in arm-chair,* R. C. *up stage, and stands,* R.—JASPER, *up stage,* L.—MEG *goes to her father*—VILLAGERS, *who have followed on, remain at door and window.*

Roland. (*to* MEG) Don't alarm yourself; he's all right. His left leg gored a little.

Meg. Gored! who did it?

Roland. The bull—the black bull, and nothing but the bull! I never saw such "lusty, lusty horns," in my life; horns indeed! more like ophicleides.

Crow. This young gentleman has saved my life; the bull had me down—one horn in my mouth, and the other in my breeches pocket, when he rushed to my rescue, waving his red handkerchief——

Roland. Like a matadore, barring the pumps and silk stockings.

Crow. Drew off the bull, and dodged him round the field! I never saw such pluck and activity in my life.

Roland. Yes, I'm up to a dodge or two.

Crow. I don't recollect any more, for I was stunned, till I found I was being carried home pick-a-back. Meg, my girl, thank him for your father's life; another moment and it would have been all dicky with Jerry Crow. Pidgeon's brother, you shall stay here and feast for a month.

Roland. So I will; I am dotingly fond of new laid eggs.

Crow. Oh, Meg will see to that.

Roland. And milk—real milk, direct from the cow.

Crow. Meg, don't forget Pidgeon's milk.

Jasp. (L. C.) Didn't I tell you he was a noble fellow! talk about

a lion's heart—what's that to a Pidgeon's pluck? (MEG *and* ROLAND *come forward*)

Meg. (L. C.) Mr. Pidgeon, we owe my father's life to your bravery; I have not grateful words strong enough—(*kisses his hand*) May heaven bless you. (ROLAND *kisses her*)

Jasp. (*aside at back*, C.) He's kissed her; and so have I—so have I!

Crow. Jasper, come here—this precious leg must be looked to. (JASPER *goes to him*)

Roland. (R. C., *aside to* MEG) Oh, Meg—Meg—may I call you Meg? darling Meg——

Meg. Sir!

Roland. (*intensely, but in a low tone to her*) I LOVE YOU!

Music—Tableau—CROW *and* JASPER, R. C., *at back*—ROLAND *and* MEG, L. C., *forward*—VILLAGERS *at back.*

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

Scene.—*The Garden and exterior of* CROW'S *Farm—The scene and lights are arranged with a view to introduce Calderon's picture of "Broken Vows."*

Enter *from house*, EYTEM, *followed by* CROW—EYTEM, *while speaking, ties up papers with red tape.*

Eytem. (R. C., *at seat*) There now, Mr. Crow, you are, as one may say, out of your difficulties.

Crow. (L. C.) Out of my difficulties? yes, by losing half my farm.

Eytem. Losing, pooh! we can't eat our pie and have our pie, as the saying is; I'm sure I've purchased of you at a very fair price.

Crow. Half the mortgage money——

Eytem. And a little over.

Crow. But I hope you'll let me have a rental of the land, and then nobody need know that I have sold it.

Eytem. Candidly, we considered the farm too large to be worked by a man without capital; however, I'll consult my partner, who is now in the village, and let you know in an hour. Where is young Jasper Pidgeon to be found?

Crow. Oh, he'll be here by-and-bye.

Eytem. I have news for him.

Crow. Good or bad?

Eytem. Both, but the latter predominates, for which I am extremely sorry; I like the lad—knew his thrifty uncle from boyhood, and more than that, Jasper once saved my life.

Crow. And his brother mine! the saving propensity runs in the family. But what is this here news you have to tell him?

Eytem. That's my business.

Crow. Well, don't snub a poor widower.

Eytem. What have I to do with your widowerhood?

Crow. I had a large farm once, but you have taken my better half. (*looks off*, R. U. E.) Here comes Sir Ashley Merton—and who's that with him? Mrs. Netwell again; he's always gallivanting with *her* now.

Eytem. You don't mean that?

Crow. They used to be enemies; but she's a sly puss, she is.

Eytem. (R.) What do you mean, sir, by calling that lady a cat? Do you know, sir, you are speaking of a client of ours? She's a clever woman, sir, if you mean that—a very clever woman.

Crow. (L. C.) No match for *you*, though, I'll be bound.

Eytem. How dare you hazard such a remark as that? I don't see why we shouldn't make a very good match.

Crow. Hilloa, lawyer! you're letting the cat out; I only meant that being a client of yours, she's like a rat in the mouth of a terrier.

Eytem. Now you compare that lady to a rat, sir? Do you know that's actionable? Pepper, Gulp & Eytem, are not to be trifled with.

Enter MERTON *and* MRS. NETWELL *from back* R., *and appear at gate*, R. C.

Merton. (*at gate*) Well, Mr. Crow, did you want to see me?

Crow. (*going up*) I did, Sir Ashley. May I beg the use of your ears for a few moments?

CROW *and* SIR ASHLEY *remain in conversation at gate*—EYTEM, *who has gone up, comes forward with* MRS. NETWELL.

Eytem. (L. C.) Mrs. Netwell! I congratulate you on having possession of the Grange again.

Mrs. N. (R. C.) Thanks to my magnanimous friend, Sir Ashley.

Eytem. (*aside to her*) Forgive my abruptness; but I am in great anxiety to inquire, my dearest Mrs. Netwell, if you have made up your mind as to the proposal I ventured to make three months ago? You said, with a grace peculiar to yourself, you would "take time to consider."

Mrs. N. Give me a little more grace, my dear solicitor; only a little.

Eytem. Commiserate my suspense; make it brief. Till when?

Mrs. N. Well, till—till—when shall I say? We'll say till Mr. Crow's eldest daughter is married to my friend, Sir Ashley——

Eytem. What have we to do with them?

Mrs. N. Nothing; only report says it is soon to be, therefore you shall soon have a positive "yes" or "no." (*they turn up stage*)

Mert. (*to* CROW—*at gate*) We'll say in a quarter of an hour, then.

Crow. I'll be back. (*going to house*, L.)

Eytem. (*up near gate*) Crow, I'm going in search of that lad Pidgeon. I'll see you again on the subject we were speaking of.

Bows to MRS. NETWELL *and* **exit**, *through gate and off* R.—**exit** CROW *into house* L.

Mert. (R. C.) Then we can have a few minutes' chat in Crow's garden, Sophia; I'm glad I met you—and how is your dear little boy?

Mrs. N. (L. C.) Quite well! he was prattling of you yesterday, and all I can do, he will insist upon calling you papa.

MERTON *and* MRS. NETWELL *walk about garden during their conversation.*

Mert. Well, let him—I rather like it.

Mrs. N. Oh, but it isn't proper; though to be sure, in superintending the development of his mind, you are acting like a papa. He's a dear child, and poor fellow, how fond he is of you!

Mert. Nice boy—very! I am getting interested in him, and shall not like to relinquish my influence.

Mrs. N. Your suggestions are so judicious—even I—I say even *I* adopt them. Do you know, on your hint, I am studying Natural Philosophy? (*they sit on garden seat*, R. C., MERTON L., MRS. NETWELL R.)

Mert. Are you, really?

Mrs. N. And mathematics.

Mert. You don't say so! What, Euclid?

Mrs. N. Yes, and I've crossed the Pons——

Mert. Asinorum? Oh, if that's the case I must take you in hand, my dear Sophia.

Mrs. N. But I feel I am trifling with my own happiness in yielding to the fascinations of your guidance.

Mert. Sophia, I'll go so far as to say, I wish I had known your ductility a year ago.

Mrs. N. And why?

Mert. Why? Oh, no matter! I am compromised—I must make the best of it. I have pledged my honor to this farmer Crow to marry his daughter, and, to tell the truth, I am here now, at his request, to settle the day for——

Mrs. N. Oh, say no more—I knew it would be so! All is over—I'm a wretched woman! (*sobs*)

Mert. No, no, dear Sophia, don't weep! You can always cherish my image, you know—in fact, I wish you to cherish my image.

Mrs. N. Oh yes, I can weep over your carte-de-visite; but where is the mind—the gigantic mind?

Mert. (*aside*) What uncommon appreciation she has!

Mrs. N. You—you love this girl?

Mert. No; don't labor under that error—that task I shall set myself after marriage, provided I find I have first created the sympathy in her.

Mrs. N. But I have no right to murmur; you have never loved me, you could not!

Mert. Yes, I could; in fact, if I were not situated as I am, I might say I do; but honor—the honor of a Merton! I am sorry for what I have done—let that console you; but honor!

Mrs. N. And you will marry her without knowing if she loves you? Well, for a philosopher you are the rashest man——(*they both rise*)

Mert. (R. C.) Stop! stop! Sir Ashley Merton may act a daring part; but a rash one—never! I have commissioned a friend to test her—in fact, to try if she be susceptible to the protestations of a more meretricious object than myself, so to speak; if she passes scathless through the ordeal, in a month she will be lady of Merton Hall.

Mrs. N. (R., *taking his hands*) And, Ashley, may you be happy! I dare scarcely hope it; but may you be happy! Let me go, I have listened too long. (*crossing in front and up* C. *to gate*)

Mert. (*following her to* L. *of gate*) Where are you going?

Mrs. N. Home—anywhere—to study philosophy.

Mert. Or mathematics. Don't take my affair too much to heart; you see I have, as it were, half crossed the stream, where retreat is cut off; I stand in the middle of a bridge——

Mrs. N. The *Pons Asinorum.* **Exit,** R. C.

Mert. She's a dear creature, and loves me unquestionably; but I must forget her—Oh, here comes my agricultural father-in-law, in cord breeches. (*crosses over to* R. C. *and sits*)

Enter CROW, *from house,* L., *and down* L. C.

Crow. (L. C.) Critikising my garden, Sir Ashley? ah, it's awful neglected; Meg seems to take no delight in it lately; I don't know what's come over the wench, she mopes about and does nothing.

Well, now, baronet, touching my Cornelia; (*sits* L., *beside* MERTON) it's time to come to an understanding; the girl has worked hard to accomplish her accomplishment—and she loves you.

Mert. (*looks at* CROW, *and rises*) Does she?

Crow. No mistake about it; she asked after your favorite poodle, in her last letter. (*rises*) Well, you know it's no use shilly-shallying; when a thing is to be done, let it be done. Now, what say you to take a stroll round the meadows, and fix the day?

Mert. (*going to the gate*) Since it must be so, come along.

Crow. (*going up*) Don't say "must be so," 'cos it's the only manly, upright way of acting—excuse me, I'm a straightforward, honest fellow—and that's the truth.

Mert. (*at gate*) Don't say "that's the truth," because it implies that your veracity is unusual. Exit *through gate and off*, R.

Crow. (*following him*) Oh, I'm not out of temper; don't imagine for a moment I'm speaking with voracity.

Exit *at gate, and off* R.

Enter MEG, *from house*, L.—*a marked change in her manner and appearance.*

Meg. (*sits disconsolately*) The day has come—this day I have so dreaded; and he is so confiding—so kind, that I don't know how to tell him the terrible truth. For months he has been happy in the expectation of to-day's assurance that he is loved. Were he only to ask me to marry him, I would! I would, though my heart should break; but he won't do that; nothing but a kindred affection would satisfy Jasper, whose own is so entire. I feel like a guilty girl—miserable, miserable!

JASPER *appears from* L. U E., *at gate* C.

Jasp. (*singing*) "Gin a corpus, meet a corpus," it says—how are you Meg?

Meg. (*on seat*, R. C.) Ah! Jasper, is that you?

Jasp. (*at gate*) I'm under the impression that it is; didn't I tell you that quarter day was one of those things that are certain to come? May a corpus come into the garden, Meg?

Meg. Oh, Jasper, you know you are welcome.

Jasp. (*coming forward*, L. C.) Well, come, but am I wanted? That's the question. Would you have been vexed if I had not come?

Meg. What can I say?

Jasp. What can you say? Come, that's a good 'un! "Yes" is a contemptible little word, but sometimes it's a whole dictionary of happiness, and don't be afraid to say it, Meg. I think that patient individual, Jasper, deserves a little encouragement, for he has kept his word—hasn't he? For three months I have seen you almost every day with my heart in my mouth—all that I cared for in the

wide world near me—and I have tried not even to think of love; but lord, I might as well have tried to eat without swallowing. I tried not to notice you, but I noticed all the more that you were changing, so meek, and so beautiful, that I began to fear it was an impossibility that you could ever belong to me. This is the day, you know, Meg, when I was to have my sentence.

Meg. Your sentence, Jasper?

Jasp. Don't repeat my words—don't lose time, my girl—every moment is a month to me! Oh, I forgot; I was to put the question plain. Well, here it is—do you *now* love me as a husband ought to be loved? (*a pause*) Did you hear me, Meg? I can't say it again, for there's such a thumping under my waistcoat, and such a walnut in my throat—and as you see, such a trembling all over me, that——

Meg. Jasper—I—I——

Jasp. What ails you, my Meg?—how ill you look! Well, then, don't say anything now—take another week; I'll bear it.

Meg. (*rises*) Good, noble Jasper!—no, not another moment. (*placing her hand in* JASPER'S) If you wish me to be your wife, I will try to be an affectionate one—I will indeed!

Jasp. (L. C.) Try!—try! (*dropping her hand*) Meg, that word—is—like a May blight; if you can't call that back again, don't say any more. Love doesn't come by trying; we don't know how it comes—it's there, and we can't help it.

Meg. (R. C.) And so it was with me!

Jasp. With you? then you do love—and—and—not me?

Meg. And if death were my punishment, it would be just. I have wickedly listened to another in the belief that there was no peril, and when too late I found I was no longer mistress of my will; and—and I would not have told you this, Jasper, if I could deceive you! I hate myself, but I will not deceive you!

Jasp. Hush, Meg—hush! I have often tossed on my pillow with a sort of superstition of what was to come, and I have reasoned with myself how to bear it; you shall see I am a man! I have gone through such a trial as few could bear; but there—you see I—I hear it; and bear it—don't I? It was not to be! Who is the happy man?

Meg. Your brother.

Jasp. Roly! I see all now; the pair of scales has dropped from my eyes. Ah! he deserves you—he's better than me, Meg. He didn't know what had passed between us, or he wouldn't have done it for the world; I'm sure he wouldn't—bless him!—and you too—he's better than me!

CROW, *from* R., *appears at the back.*

Crow. Hi! Jasper—look out! the Exeter coach has pulled up at the Crown, and your brother is on the box, as large as life,

(*looks off*, L.) now he's down, and—and handing out our Nelly; come along, we'll run over and meet them. (*calling off*) How are you! I'm coming. Exit, L. U. E.

Jasp. Roly there! I can't see him just yet, it's too much. I'll go through the house, and collect myself in the poultry-yard. You needn't let him know, Meg, that I was at all knocked over by what you have told me, because, poor fellow, he may feel hurt, you know; so I'll go, and try to put on a jocular expression—it's all right. Exit *into house*, L.

Enter CROW *at gate, from* L. U. E.

Crow. Look alive, Meg! they've had no breakfast—run in, and toss up something for the famished travelers—a few bacon and eggs, or—no, a slice of eggs and bacon—I say, deuced odd their coming from Exeter together, isn't it? I wonder if they knew it! Why, how you stand, looking as pale as a ghost! (*crossing over to* L.) Come in, and see Lady Nelly—hang'd if she doesn't look like a duchess. (*hurries into house*, L. 2 E.)

Meg. Two months since I have heard that earnest voice, which made me false to my deep resolves—that voice, still on my ear so persuading—so true! I shall again listen to answer—yes—answer to him now; though I must not tell what a hard struggle between love and conscience I have had—for his sake!

Roland. (*speaking at back*, L.) Don't go in yet; I must—I will speak with you first.

Meg. (*goes toward fence*, L. C.) Ah! 'tis he! his footstep, and—some one is with him. How foolishly unnerved I am at meeting—I——

Cornelia. (*outside*, L. U. E.) Be quick, then, dear Roland; my sister will think it so strange if I delay rushing into her arms.

Meg. That—that is Cornelia's voice—*she* is with him.

ROLAND *and* CORNELIA *appear behind the fence*, L. C., *a portion of the top of which being broken, admits of their faces being seen.*

Roland. Cornelia, my own, we must decide how we are to act. I am for plain, straightforward dealing; leave me to break the matter to Merton and your father—darling Cornelia! I love you tenderly—deeply; and you have confessed your love for me!

Meg. Powers of Mercy! what do I hear? (*staggers against wall-piece*, L. U. E.)

Corn. Do as you think best, Roland. Give me that flower as a pledge that you will never be any but mine. I should die—I'm sure I should—were I to lose you! You are my first and last love!

Roland. Ever mine! (*holds up a flower, and as she attempts to take it, he kisses her*—MEG *places her hand to her heart—Music—*

this realizes the picture of "Broken Vows") Then I have your sanction to break it to them at once?

Corn. Yes, dear; but I must go in, I must indeed. You'll follow soon, won't you, my Roland? (*disappears*, L. U. E.)

Meg. (*totters forward*, L. C.) The world is gone—is lost! Oh, if I could die—if I could die!

Roland. (*who* enters *through gate*, C.) Holloa! Meg—frolicsome Meg here! (*aside*) She has heard; well, so much the better. (*aloud*) My—my hoaxing little friend Meg, here I am back again; give me your hand, beguiler of my idle hours. (*approaches—offering hand*)

Meg. (L. C., *recoiling*) No, no! touch me not—touch me not! sooner would I—(*aside*) I am choking, stifling—touch me not! (*staggers into house*, L. 2 E.)

Roland. So, so! I have avenged our family honor there, at any rate. Well, the puss deserved it; but I didn't expect I had struck so deeply—in fact, I have my qualms as to the manliness of hoaxing to such an extent, but she'll get over it. I'll remind her of all she did to poor Jasper. Oh, she deserves the lesson unquestionably. But there's another difficulty; how shall I extenuate my conduct to Merton—Sir Ashley Merton, as he is now? The paintbrush of circumstance has certainly daubed me a villainous color, but I love Cornelia—I adore her, and I can't help it; he shouldn't have set me such a dangerous task—man is but man. Oh, he's another deserving object; he deserves it all! I'll brazen it out—fight him, if needs must.

Mert. (*at gate*, *from* R. U. E.) I saw the coach rounding the corner, and deuce take me if I didn't think it was a Pidgeon's torso on the box. (enters, *and down* R. C.) Well, my friend—for I have created you the friend of my bosom—how are you, friend?

Roland. (L. C., *aside*) Friend! Hear this, ye gods!

Mert. Not to lose time—did you—did you execute that—that little commission for me?

Roland. Commission! What do you mean, Sir Ashley, by commission? Do you take me for a commercial traveler?

Mert. I mean that delicate little test—the test of my wife *in posse*.

Roland. I did, sir. She does not love you!

Mert. What?

Roland. No, sir! I am prepared for the volcano of your indignation. Vomit your lava—let your crater gape! She does not love you.

Mert. My dear fellow——

Roland. Sir, she loves another! Yes, I see the gathering storm-cloud on your brow—let it burst! She loves another!

Mert. My dear fellow——

Roland. That other is *me*—your tool, sir—your *fool*, as you

thought, but I only say "tool." I leave you to call me names. "Villainous scoundrel!—treacherous rascal!" are on your tongue. Uncork your adjectives—I'm prepared for them.

Mert. My dear fellow——

Roland. And I love her, madly—overwhelmingly—you'd like to dash me to the earth; I can see you'd like to dash me—dash away, if you like, I'm prepared to be dashed!

Mert. My dear——

Roland. True love—the genuine article—has eclipsed your Brummagem philosophy, and maddened you—you know not what to say—you are about to tear your hair—root it out—throw it in my face—I'm prepared!

Mert. (*coolly wiping his head, which is bald*) My dear fellow, I'm very much obliged to you.

Roland. Eh?

Mert. (R. C.) In fact if money were in question, there would be no pecuniary bounds to my gratitude; you have freed me from a nightmare.

Roland. (L. C.) How sir, do you call that sweet girl a nightmare? Hang your knightly impudence!

Mert. She is, I grant, a sweet creature, but I know a sweeter.

Roland. How dare you assert there's a sweeter creature on the face of the earth? Anything sweeter would be nauseous.

Mert. Now don't be unreasonable, when I congratulate and thank you for doing me an unlooked-for-kindness.

Roland. What do you mean by kindness? Any man of right feeling would have gone into a passion about it—and now I think of it, I ought to call you to account for your duplicity to that dear girl.

Mert. Has all the duplicity been on my side? Come, be contented, my friend, that fortune favors you.

Roland. No; I wanted to do something for her sake! I wanted to quarrel about her, and you've baulked me in a most ungentlemanly manner.

Enter CORNELIA *from house*, L.

Mert. (R.) Cornelia! Cornelia! I'm delighted to see you looking so charmingly; but why do you first turn crimson and then pale as a lily?

Corn. (*who has gone down*, C., *runs to* ROLAND) Oh! save me—save me! he'll kill me! I know he will. See, he's fumbling in his waistcoat for a weapon. Save me!

Roland. (*putting her over to* L.) Oh! I've tamed him: we've had an awful row, but I've tamed him.

Mert. (R.—*to* CORNELIA) So you have deserted the worthy fellow who wanted to create a female prodigy, and substituted another worthy fellow with a prodigious quantity of love. You are

right, my child; and if future friendship is not objectionable, Sir Ashley Merton is yours to command. I will not intrude upon the privacy of true lovers. Good-bye for the present!

Exit *through gate and off*, R.

Corn. (L.) There's a disgraceful way of turning me off; I call that insulting!

Roland. (C.) Do you, my darling? Then I'll make him apologize! (*going up to gate—calling*) Hi! you, sir! you uncommonly placed knight—you K. C. B.—or whatever you call yourself—come back and apologize! (*runs through gate and off*, R.)

Corn. I never cared anything for him; but one doesn't like to be held so cheaply as that in the presence of one's lover, who would have valued one the more for a *fracas*.

Enter MEG, *door* L. 2 E.—*seeing* CORNELIA, *is turning back.*

Corn. Come here, sister dear, I want to speak to you. (*brings her forward*) You look so ill, dear, that I'm quite grieved; and you've scarcely exchanged one word with your Cornelia—what is wrong? Are you angry with me about anything?

Meg. (L. C.) Oh, no!

Corn. (R. C.) Well, then, kiss me.

Meg. Yes.

Corn. Yes, but you don't! You always were the first to embrace the sister you said you were proud of, and are you not proud of me still? Ah, then I must kiss *you*. (*kisses* MEG)

Meg. (*falling on her neck and sobbing*) Oh, Cornelia! Cornelia!

Corn. That's right, darling; if you have a sorrow, share it with Cornelia—Oh! I must tell you my secret—something that will really astonish, perhaps displease you, but it couldn't be helped. Sit down, I'll open my heart to you by way of example. (*places* MEG *on garden seat, and sits* R. *of her*) Meg, you know how I obeyed my father's wish, and consented to sacrifice myself to a man I could never love. *Never love!* Meg, those are hard words for a girl of eighteen to brood over; but now, sister, I *do* love—I love another so truly, that my whole life is bound up in his—that man is Roland. Oh, how white you are, and how your lips quiver! Don't you approve of it, Meg?

Meg. (*with effort*) May you never know what it is to lose the man you love so tenderly!

Corn. But why should you hint at such a dreadful thing? I would stake my life on his fidelity—he is incapable of deceit.

Meg. Others may have thought the same.

Corn. For shame, Margaret! You would have me think I am not the first who has listened to Roland's vows; and if so, what do I care to whom he has been false, so long as I know he is true to me?

Meg. Is favored love so pitiless? But if he should be sporting with your credulity?

Corn. Nonsense! All people are not adepts at such sport as you are; and the girl who cannot distinguish sincerity from seeming, deserves to be trifled with—her blind vanity claims no pity.

Meg. Sister—sister, what have you to depend on but oaths which may be false, intensity which may be feigned? For there are men who can act such love, and glory in hypocrisy. Even he——

Corn. (*rising*) Even he! Say no more, or I shall hate you, Meg! You would like to fill my mind with base suspicions, but you shan't; for were it true, there would fall such a blight on all my life to come, as even you would grieve at—you who have resolved, in your little way, to poison our happiness. *You* have never loved!

Meg. (L., *rising*) Oh, Cornelia, Cornelia, prove him! Hold back your heart, my own darling sister, till you are sure. Appeal to his mercy—to his manhood; and if—if he really loves you, then, as you say, why care whom else he has deceived? Take him—be happy—and all my hope be with you!

Corn. (R.) Why, one would think, to hear you talk, that you were giving me something of your own; but, if you are not jealous of my conquest, you will befriend me with papa, won't you? he will be so angry! (JASPER *appears at door of house*, L.) I declare, here is Jasper Pidgeon, looking quite civilized and refined. Meg, you recollect that famous trick you practiced on him?

Meg. Silence, Cornelia! if I have ever repented a heartless act, it is that. Never, if you would spare me tears of shame, speak of that crime again.

Corn. (*aside*) She loves him! as I live, she loves him! (*aloud*) Well, I'm sorry we imposed upon the poor fellow, because, after all, he is the brother of my Roland. (JASPER, *who has crossed at back, goes down*, R.) Soh, my learned brother, and how has the world used you?

Jasp. (*glancing at* MEG) Mine was a very small world, Miss Cornelian, and it used me as well as circumstances over which it had no control would let it.

Corn. (C.) Well, Jasper, I am not going away again, and I hope to see you very often, for I mean to grow very fond of you.

Jasp. Yes, do, because I shall be a sort of relation; not one that you'll care to brag about, but still——

Corn. (*going up*) Ah, he has told you already; here he comes; doesn't he look handsome, Meg? I'm sure, Jasper, you ought to be proud of him.

Meg. (*going toward house*, L.) I—I am wanted; let me go into the house.

Jasp. And would you mind going with her, Miss Cornelian? The fact is, I want to speak to Roly confidential.

Corn. (*up stage*, L. C.) Yes; but use adverbs, don't call me Cornelian, and don't call him Roly. (*going into house, turns to* MEG *who is standing by the door*) You wouldn't like him called "Roly," if he belonged to you, would you? such a noble fellow, isn't he? Exit CORNELIA, *followed by* MEG, *into house*, L.

Enter ROLAND, *from* R., *and through gate.*

Roland. (*down*, R.) Ah, Jasper, boy, here I am, you see, well and happy.

Jasp. (L.) So you ought to, Roly; if ever a man had a right to be, *you* have. (*grasping his hand*) You are loved by an angel, Ro; be good to her! What an ass I am to say such a thing—of course you will! I con-con-grat—Well, that's a hard word for me to say; but you know what I mean.

Roland. Yes, she has told you already; you're right, I am a lucky fellow. By-the-bye, have you heard from Eytem to-day?

Jasp. No.

Roland. He has bad news for you, lad, but don't be cast down. You shan't want for money.

Jasp. Oh, I know what you mean—that paltry money—a fleabite!

Roland. Fleabite?

Jasp. The thousand I cleared by Mrs. Netwell's estate, Eytem persuaded me to throw into a healthy Australian Company—so healthy that it burst itself, I suppose—never mind.

Roland. No, it isn't that.

Jasp. Then never mind what it is now. When you are married—to—to—Meg, brother, you shall have joint stock in all that I've got, and——

Roland. Married to Meg! What are you thinking about? I care nothing about Meg.

Jasp. Don't jest, Roly; I know all—Meg loves you, and a king might hold his royal head a little higher at that.

Roland. Ha! ha! ha! What, have you been sold too? Pooh! pooh! lad—she derided—insulted you; I swore internally that I would pay her back in her own spurious coin—and I did; the finest bit of counterfeit you ever saw. I declared that I loved her—that I lived but for her—hers and hers only—without her, most lonely, and a lot more balderdash so artistically delivered, that, hang me if she didn't believe it.

Jasp. You did this? you?

Roland. (*taking* JASPER'S *hand*) For my brother's sake, my boy——

Jasp. (*snatching his hand away*) Then you're a villain—a cowardly, cruel villain!

Roland. Hilloa!

Jasp. You own, deliberate, to have made a good—affectionate girl wrongfully believe you loved her.

Roland. Didn't she do the same to a good, affectionate brother of mine?

Jasp. What's that to you, if I choose to let her?

Roland. Didn't she ticket your innocent back?

Jasp. What's my innocent back to you, if I like to be ticketed?

Roland. Well, there certainly is something fascinating about the little gipsy, but——

Jasp. (*earnestly*) Roly, you mustn't break her heart; you *shan't!* If you are a gentleman—and I have felt rather proud that we had *one* in the family—if you are a gentleman, you must act like one.

Roland. But a gentleman can't fall in love simply because you command it.

Jasp. He can! you must! Oh, brother, that is no difficult task with her; the more you know her, the more you'll find you can't help it.

Roland. But I love another——

Jasp. It's false! it's false!

Enter MEG, *unseen by them, from the house,* L., *and remains up stage.*

Roly, Roly, I have thought you better than other men—prove that you are; I love you; but all the brothers in the world are nothing to me where she is concerned. Wrong her, and I'm your deadly enemy—and that I shouldn't like to be to you, Roly. Perhaps you shrink from a girl who hasn't a purse! then what I have is yours—take it freely—I want nothing! Ro', this is no brag, I mean it; but carry out the hopes you have raised in that poor girl's heart.

Roland. I tell you I am pledged to her sister.

Jasp. Her sister?

Roland. Cornelia; and as to your generosity, dear boy, I am sorry to break the news in the midst of your anger, but you have nothing. Eytem has just discovered, what I all along suspected—our uncle made a recent codicil, stating that, though some little folly of mine had incensed him, he forgave and left all to me.

Jasp. And take it! What is wealth to me who have no one to share it? But won't *you* prove yourself worthy of it, by acting with honor to Meg?

Roland. Once for all, I can't.

Jasp. Then, brother be hanged! you are no brother of mine, and I have no means of revenging poor Meg's wrong but by this arm, which before now has fought for justice in the workshop, and thrashed a rascal as I will you—yes, *you!* (*throws off his coat*) The name of a penniless mechanic—the name of his father, is disgraced by a gentleman! Let manhood be the referee—come on! (MEG *rushes between them,* C.)

Meg. (C.) Jasper, for my sake, no! I heard all, with what utter change of feelings I have no words to tell; but were he free from every other tie, could affection deeper than that he so admirably feigned possess this gentleman at your bidding—I should reject him, because—I love no longer! the magic has melted—the infatuation is over! (*to* ROLAND) Sir, though I truly feel this, don't think it is said in anger. I richly merited your unsparing lesson, and if I am a wiser girl for the future, 'tis you, perhaps, I have to thank. There is my hand. I ask one favor in waking from this foolish dream—don't let your triumph over me be mentioned to my sister.

Roland. (R.) I promise, Meg, faithfully, for I'm not at all vain of the part I have played; if Jasper had thrashed me it would have served me right, though 'tis as well that Pidgeons of one family shouldn't "fall out, and chide, and fight," as Doctor what's-his-name says.

Meg. And since kindred had nearly been forgotten on my account, let me restore the link. (*joins their hands*) Remember, Jasper, your brother was your champion.

Jasp. (L.) A pretty sort of champion to go in right and left at a woman—excuse me for calling you a woman, Meg; but if I see you pining about him, my glue-pot will boil over again. I will see you the Meg I used to know, before I cross the briny ocean.

Meg. Stay here, Jasper.

Roland. Of course he will. He offered to share his sum total with me, and he shall find that I can do simple division in my sums as well as he can.

Jasp. Not a pound, Ro'. (*crosses to* C.) I'll hand you over all I have had; but there's one thing troubles me—I have lent two thousand pounds.

Roland. Cornelia has told me all about it; that debt I insist upon taking on my own shoulders. Give me the notes of hand.

Jasp. (*takes notes out of a pocket-book—as he is giving them, draws back*) You won't trouble Meg's father about them? Honor bright?

Roland. As a brass-knocker. (*takes notes and tears them up*) Nobody shall say, "I owe" to Roly!

Jasp. He's not all bad—is he, Meg?

Roland. Oh, Jasper and I are made of the right stuff—eh?

Meg. (L.) You have both been good to my father—very good, and to me—but there—I cannot wrong Jasper by saying you have his heart.

Roland. (*aside*) Hanged if I don't think there's hope for Jasper yet. (*aloud*) Well, I must go and find our agricultural parent. (*crossing to* L.) And I hope in a serene state, for I shall make a clean breast, and then its tenant won't be ashamed to display its palpitations. Exit *into house*, L.

Jasp. (*up* C.) Now, I'll put on my jacket, and stick to the bench till I've earned a passage to Australia.

Meg. (L. C., *picking a flower*) And what will you do there?

Jasp. I don't know—perhaps get a government appointment as bushranger. Oh, mind you, I know something about farming, and——

Meg. And who is to befriend me when you are gone, Jasper? (*looking off*, R. U. E.) Poor Sir Ashley is coming; I must get out of his way! I haven't the heart to be the first to tell him of his misfortune.

Jasp. Oh, bless you, he's a philosopher; he isn't such a fool as I am, Meg. (*looks off*, R.) There; the silly fellow has dropped his kid glove into the hog-wash! If you want to slip off, now's your time!—let's go and cheer one another by indulging in our melancholy thoughts. (*as they go through gate to* L.) Do you ever wonder what harm you'd done to your mother, that she should have punished you by bringing you into the world? I do.

Exit JASPER, L. U. E., *followed by* MEG, *talking*.

Enter CROW, *followed by* ROLAND, *from house*, L.—ROLAND *goes down*, L.

Crow. (*speaks as he enters*) What, sir? What? How dare you name such a thing? Love my daughter Cornelia! Why, confound it, if I didn't owe my life to you, I'd take yours on the spot! —Cornelia—Lady Merton—good gracious! I had begun to think you was dangling after Meg, and even that was—but Corn-e-lia indeed! Oh, here comes Sir Ashley himself. Confound you, I'll expose you!—I'll have no pity on you—I'll hand you over to him!

Enter MERTON, *through gate* C., *and down* R.

Here, Sir Ash; resent your own insult; here's this here individual —I don't know what else to call him—has dared—with full knowledge of your priory right and title, to ask my sanction to his making love to Cornelia!

Mert. (R.) Well, I really don't know anything against the gentleman.

Crow. (C.) Against the what! the "gentleman!" Did you hear what I said? He pits himself against *you* with my daughter.

Mert. I must decline to be pitied; it must not be said in history, that Sir Ashley Merton, fourth baronet of that name, was an obstacle to the course of true love; so if Cornelia loves him——

Crow. If she—loves him! Is this a conspiracy to drive me mad? Sir Ashley, is that girl—who has been studying unnatural philosophy, and the deuce knows what all, to prove her affection for you, to be villifried by such an insinuation as that? Oh, here she is!

Enter CORNELIA, *from house*, L., *and down*, L. C.

Nelly! Nelly! here's pretty scandal going on about you, but to cut the matter short—you see these here two—a gentleman, and a —individual, don't you? Well, which of them do you love?

Corn. (*turning* L. *to* ROLAND) This gentleman, dear father.

Mert. (R.) Pardon me—that's the "individual."

Crow. Fire and fury! this is a conspiracy; but I'll soon bring this fine boarding-school miss to her senses. As for you, (*to* ROLAND) you penniless scamp, I'll prosecute you for—for—I don't know what; but it's felony. Sir Ashley, I shall forthwith take proceedings against you for—for—well, never mind what it's called—I can afford to go to law.

Enter EYTEM *and* MRS. NETWELL *from* R., *through gate*—JASPER *and* MEG *from* L., *and remain at gate talking*—MRS. NETWELL *remains up*, R., *and is joined by* MERTON.

Eytem. (*coming down*, R.) Who talks of going to law? Law has come to you.

Crow. (C.) Here's a breach, Mr. Eytem. I lay my damages at twenty thousand at the least—Sir Ashley cries off—he deserts my daughter!

Eytem. So my fair client tells me; and it appears that Mr. Roland Pidgeon is now the lucky man.

Crow. He shall have the luck of my horsewhip about his shoulders if——

Eytem. Sir, this young gentleman is now proved to be the real claimant of his uncle's estate, value twenty thousand at the least.

Crow. (*cooling down*) Oh, is he? And you say, Sir A., that you decline off my daughter?

Mert. (*up*, R.) I have no alternative.

Crow. "Turnative" indeed! then I'll punish you, sir, by—by

accepting this young bull-fighter; hang'd if I don't; but I've been deceived once—I'll keep a pretty sharp look-out on my other wench. (*to* MEG) What are you doing, talking to that mechanical pauper!

Eytem. (*aside*) I must put in a word for *him* too. (*aloud*) Mr. Crow, I have consulted my partner, and he refuses to rent the farm to you.

Crow. He does?

Eytem. Jasper, my lad, (JASPER *down* R.) you entrusted a thousand pounds to me for investment; I bought and sold your shares at an extraordinary crisis, and doubled your capital in a week. One half of this farm now belongs to us; throw your cash into it, and show this farmer of the old school what intelligence and manure will do with waste land.

Jasper. (R.) Set up an opposition shop to Meg's father? No, I'm blessed if I do, Mr. Eytem! but, if you will let the land to Mr. Crow, and he likes to take me as a sort of partner, now——

Crow. (L.) Worse and worse! why, he'd be plowing the land with a jack-plane.

Meg. (*aside to* CROW, L.) Father! father! Jasper was a good friend to you when you needed it.

Eytem. (*to* CROW) Come here, and listen to counsel *pro* and *con*. (*all retire up*—MERTON *and* MRS. N. *come forward*)

Mert. (R. C.) Now, Sophia, the spell is withdrawn from my tongue and I may fearlessly declare I love you; yes, it has been coming on, so to speak, for the last three months.

Mrs. N. (L. C.) Then, Sir Ashley, you must take me as I am—a mere woman. If 'tis a question of love, I relinquish philosophy and mathematics.

Mert. What, won't you study Euclid?

Mrs. N. I'll study you, and you only! you were my *pons asinorum*, and I have mastered you—Q. E. D. I have discovered that you have great intellect——

Mert. Dear Sophia!

Mrs. N. But you require the guidance of a practical mind.

Mert. I think I do.

Mrs. N. Be ruled by me in *all* things; and like poor dear Netwell, your home will be your heaven.

Mert. Yes, Netwell "went home" very soon after he was married. Well, do as you please with me, but be mine.

Eytem. (*coming down*) Pardon me, Sir Ashley. (MERTON *goes up* R.) Mrs. Netwell, can I have the happiness of speaking a few words—privately?

Mrs. N. (R., *aside to him*) Too late, Mr. Eytem—engaged!

Eytem. (*aside*) Deuce take it, the baronet has been before me—(*to* MRS. NETWELL) I see, madam—I now see why you held me

on and off *a corps de reserve*—in fact you considered me a decoy duck.

Mrs. N. Mr. Eytem! I never considered you a duck—come, don't be vexed ; I'm not worthy of it.

Eytem. Vexed! no ; but I've been taught a lesson—Pepper, Gulp & Eytem are not to be trifled with generally, but old Harry himself may be taken in by a widow.

Mrs. N. Oh, Mr. Eytem, for shame! I really didn't even know your name *was* Harry. (*they separate and go up*—JASPER *and* MEG *come forward*)

Jasp. (L. C.) Then it's settled. Pidgeon & Crow ; I'm to be the governor's partner ; but I'll work early and late—and mark my words, the farm shall all be his again by-and-bye, for your sake.

Meg. (R. C.) For *my* sake, Jasper! Is it possible you can have a kind thought of me still?

Jasp. Meg, I think better of myself since I've discovered my thoughts of you are not at all selfish, and I'll keep so—at least, I'll try.

Meg. That word, Jasper; don't you remember reproving me for saying I'd try?

Jasp. Poor girl, and so I did ; well, don't try any more, there's no need.

Meg. There is not, indeed ; the very error which led me astray proved the generous heart I had deserted, and made me humbled ; know that—I cannot say it——

Jasp. Whisper it, Meg, and then I'll pretend not to hear it. (MEG *whispers*)

Crow. (*coming down*, L. C.) Hoa, there! what's that whispering about? (*all come forward*)

Roland. (*aside to* CORNELIA, L.) I can guess. Another Pidgeon will pair off with another Crow.

Crow. There's no occasion to conceal nothing from *me*, I'm sure. A baronet throws over my daughter and I forgive him ; a young bull-fighter seizes her, willy nilly—I tumble to it ; my daughter herself makes an ass of me, and I'm patient; a lawyer chisels me, and I take it as a thing of course. A bread-and-cheese carpenter is thrust on me as partner, and I receive him with open arms. So hang me if I haven't come to the belief that I'm an angel in top-boots, and that's the truth.

Eytem. (*leaning on back of seat*, R. C.) Well done, farmer; I see you know how to make a virtue of necessity.

Crow. But what's the secret, Meg?

Meg. I whisper'd, "Don't condemn my errors past,
The heart may stray, yet, turning right at last,
Learn to reward an honest, pure affection."

Roland. (*aside*) Soh! my suspicion took the right direction.

Jasper. (*to audience*) She said—but no! it isn't fair to tell—
Yet, Meg's Diversion, may, we hope, end well;
For Pidgeon's proud to own he's caught and caged,
Don't ask me to say more—look here!

Pulls the placard used in Act I from his pocket, and pins it on his breast, displaying the word—"ENGAGED."

TABLEAU.

MEG. JASPER.

EYTEM. (*leaning on back of seat*) CROW.

CORNELIA.

MERT. AND MRS. N. (*on seat*) ROLAND.

R. C. L.

CURTAIN.

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32. **POPPING THE QUESTION.** A farce in one act. Two male, four female characters. Time, forty minutes.
33. **THAT RASCAL PAT.** A farce in one act. Three male, two female characters. Time, thirty minutes.
34. **SOLON SHINGLE.** A comedy in two acts. Seven male, two female characters. Time, one hour and a half.
35. **NOT SUCH A FOOL AS HE LOOKS.** A comedy in three acts. Five male, four female characters. Time, two hours and a half.
36. **OUR BOYS.** A comedy in three acts. Six male, four female characters. Time, two hours.
37. **CASTE.** A comedy in three acts. Five male, three female characters. Time, two hours and half.
38. **HOME.** A comedy in three acts. Four male, three female characters. Time, two hours.
39. **MEG'S DIVERSION.** A drama in two acts. Five male, three female characters. Time, one hour and three quarters.
40. **MIRIAM'S CRIME.** A drama in three acts. Five male, three female characters. Time, two hours.
41. **BY FORCE OF IMPULSE.** A drama in three acts. Nine male, three female characters. Time, two hours and a half.
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